

PREFACE

The time spent on researching and writing this book is almost as long as the time span covered by the book itself, about one and a half decades. The research ideas emerged in June 1989, when I was finishing a postdoctoral fellowship at the East-West Population Institute (EWPI) in Honolulu, Hawaii. My wife Yang Haiou had just completed her Ph.D. degree in sociology at the University of Hawaii. From that beautiful paradise island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, we were half way on our return to China.

By that time, profound social and economic upheavals had already engulfed the Chinese landmass, reversing three decades of the socialist rule. People's Communes in rural China were dismantled in the early 1980s. Chinese farmers had already begun farming under the household organization, just as they had prior to the days of the collectivization. Rural non-agricultural activities were on the upsurge, and some rural Chinese had started migrating into cities. For Chinese living in the cities, price reforms in the preceding years resulted in double-digit inflation not seen by Chinese citizens for decades.

Meanwhile, loopholes created by the same reforms allowed those who had access to political power to reap substantial benefit. The emerging economic inequality was thus perceived by the population as being a result of political corruption. Popular appeals for political reform, complicated by internal power struggles within the Chinese Communist Party, led to massive demonstrations in Beijing and elsewhere during spring, and ended with a bloody crackdown, on June 4, 1989, that shocked the world. Our planned return to Beijing, on June 17, had to be postponed. In our company were many other Chinese visitors who were attending meetings and workshops at the East-West Center.

One of these visitors was a statistician from China's National Bureau of Statistics (then the State Statistical Bureau), Mr. Li Xuezheng. In the days following the Tiananmen crackdown, we talked at length about the underlying social forces that provoked such a massive movement. Rising inequality was one of the subjects. Shortly before his return to Beijing, Li Xuezheng offered to help me establish ties with his colleagues, in order to obtain household survey data to study the trends and patterns of urban income inequality. Between 1990 and 1996, I organized a number of workshops at the East-West Center, attended by staff members of China's National Bureau of Statistics and colleagues in Chinese universities. These workshops led to the establishment of computerized data files and codebooks for the data and to identifying collaborative research questions. In the summer of 1995, I undertook my first extensive field visit to Liaoning province, one of the provinces studied in this book. By the time I moved to the University of California at Irvine in 1996, the initial preparations for this study were largely complete.

In the fall of 1998, after finishing a collaborative book project on Chinese demography and society, I returned to this project in full gear. A grant from the American Council of Learned Societies allowed me to carry out more fieldwork in the summer of 1999 in Chongqing and in the following year in Sichuan and Guangdong, and a visiting professorship position in the spring of 2000 at Peking University served as an excellent opportunity for me to learn in depth from my colleagues about their research.

Two events in 1999 were critical in setting the direction of this research project and this book. The first was a field trip I took with colleague and friend Wang Tianfu, then a Ph.D. student in sociology at the University of Chicago. We set out to observe rising inequality among urban residents in different cities in Chongqing, which was formerly a part of Sichuan province. To our surprise, the most common remarks and sometimes complaints from our respondents were not about rising inequality but about persisting equality. Discussions during the field trip with Wang Tianfu, and at various times at Peking University with professors Yang Shanhua and Wang Hansheng, led me to broaden the scope of investigation from merely focusing on the trends to the patterns of inequality, which also encompasses the enduring equality.

The second event was a visit from Wang Youjuan at Peking University. Wang Youjuan was a participant of a 1995 East-West Center workshop.

By 1999, he was the Division Chief of the Urban Socio-economic Survey Organization within the National Bureau of Statistics, in charge of urban household surveys. Wang Youjuan kindly encouraged me to reestablish working ties with his organization and to continue the collaboration that was interrupted by my move to California in 1996. That collaboration allowed the extension of empirical survey data used in this study to the year 2000.

The writing of this book took place in Irvine, California; Beijing and Hong Kong, China; and Tokyo, Japan. Whereas most data analyses were carried out in Beijing and in Irvine, most writing was completed with the benefit of three visits to Keio University, Tokyo, and a sabbatical quarter as a visiting professor at Hong Kong Baptist University between December 2002 and April 2003. The first Tokyo visit, in July 2001 at Keio's Center of Excellence, helped draft several chapters. A second visit, between February and March 2002, led to the completion of the first draft. A third visit, in June and July 2006, allowed revision of the whole manuscript. For all three visits, I am deeply grateful to Keio University, and in particular, to Noriko Tsuya, who invited me for these trips. I am also grateful to Jessica Tang, who provided editorial assistance in Tokyo in 2006. Between the latter two Tokyo visits, the visit in Hong Kong was spent revising the book manuscript and completing the Appendix of the book. I would like to thank Ruan Danqing for making that visit possible.

Many colleagues read earlier drafts of the manuscript and offered extremely valuable criticisms, suggestions, and encouragements. Among them, I am especially grateful to Cai Yong, Chen Jieming, Philip Cohen, Deborah Davis, Matt Huffman, William Lavelly, James Lee, Albert Park, Dorothy Solinger, Su Yang, Andrew Walder, Wang Tianfu, Martin Whyte, and Xueguang Zhou, who not only read the manuscript but also posed hard questions and provided extremely valuable suggestions and help.

Whereas it is obvious that any failures and shortcomings are entirely my own, the book would not be nearly where it is without the critical input from the colleagues listed here, especially Xueguang Zhou and Andrew Walder, whose advice and suggestions helped focus and sharpen the arguments of the book. Su Yang and Dorothy Solinger, two colleagues at UC-Irvine, provided both intellectual and spiritual support. A number of individuals who assisted in my field research include Chen Xiaojie, who went with me to Shenyang and Fushun in Liaoning province in 1995; Li

Dongshan, who accompanied me to Chengdu and to Zigong in Sichuan and helped arrange many interviews in 2000; and Ren Ping, who helped with arranging several interviews in the same year in Guangdong. Chen Shengli, a long time friend, provided crucial help in setting up visits in Sichuan and Guangdong. Qiu Lixia, Lingnam Hung, and Pearl Li provided assistance in data file construction and data cleaning. To all these colleagues and friends, I am deeply indebted.

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Above all, throughout the long process of research and writing of this book, my wife Haiou and son Max have been constant sources of unconditional support and love. To them a thank you is simply not enough.